

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2023

Remarks on the Establishment of the White House Office of Gun Violence Prevention

September 22, 2023

The President. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Audience member. We love you, Joe! *[Laughter]*

The President. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Everyone should sit, except Mom and Dad. Mom and Dad, stand up. I want everybody to see the parents of this proud, young, new Congressman. You did a heck of a job.

Congressman Frost, thank you for the introduction. And you've helped power a movement that's turning a cause into reality. You know, you're the big reason why I'm so optimistic about America's future. So many—so many—engaged young people.

So many engaged, I remember when I was young. *[Laughter]* We have something in common: I got elected to the Senate when I was 29 years old. Only difference was, he was eligible when he got elected to take office; I had to wait 17 days to be eligible. That was 827 years ago, but it was a while. *[Laughter]*

And, folks, Vice President Harris, members of the Cabinet, and so many Members of Congress who are here and the relentless leaders on this critical issue.

You know, one of the Members who couldn't be here today is a really important Member: Senator Chris Murphy. With Chris, who, together with Congressman Frost, introduced the bill that created a dedicated gun violence prevention office—he couldn't be here today.

Since the tragedy in Sandy Hook—and I remember being there. I remember that—how I met with every one of the parents who were there. I met with every member—every family member.

And what I do also remember is that—I remember as we were leaving, the State police doing the investigation asked the Senator if they'd meet with me—if I could meet with them. And I said of course I would. And I think there were about 12 to 14 of them. I walked in a room, and two of them started crying. And they said: "We need help. We need help." And I looked at them; I said, "What can I do?" They said: "We need psychiatric help. We need help. We need help."

Anyone who doesn't think that these kinds of engagements have a permanent effect on young children—and, in many cases, alter their entire lives even if they've never had a bullet touch them—misunderstands. These were hard and tough cops asking me could I get them psychiatric help.

To all the State and local leaders and advocates from all across the country—and to the survivors and families who are with us today, many of whom Jill and I have gotten to know—and by the way, our losses may be different circumstances, but I know events like this are really hard to attend. You want to be here to promote the change, but it brings back all the memories as if it happened a day ago.

And I thank you, those of you who are parents, for being here—brothers, sisters for being here. It matters. You have absolute courage; you found purpose in your pain.

And because of all of you here today, all across the country, survivors, families, advocates—especially young people who demand our Nation do better to protect all; who protested, organized, voted, and ran for office, and yes, marched for their lives—I'm proud to announce the

creation of the first-ever White House Office of Gun Violence Prevention, the first office in our history.

I created—by Executive order, I determined to send a clear message about how important this issue is to me and to the country. It matters.

And here's why: After every mass shooting, we hear a simple message, the same message heard all over the country, and I've been to every mass shooting: Do something. Please do something. Do something to prevent the tragedies that leave behind survivors who will always carry the physical and emotional scars, families who will never quite be the same, communities overwhelmed by grief and trauma. Do something. Do something.

Well, my administration has been working relentlessly to do something. To date, my administration has announced dozens of executive actions to reduce gun violence, more than any of my predecessors at this point in their Presidencies. And they include everything from cracking down on ghost guns, breaking up gun trafficking, and so much more.

And last year, with the help—your help, I signed into law the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, the most significant gun safety law in almost 30 years. It strengthens background checks, expands the use of "red flag" laws, improves access to mental health services, and so much more.

This historic law will save lives. It's a really important first step.

And by the way, I was the guy—along with a woman in California—who also—we once banned assault weapons and multiple magazines. We're going to do it again. We're going to do it again.

A call to action. A reason to hope. Because for so long, the conventional wisdom was we'd never get any Republicans to support gun safety legislation. But we did.

For the first time in three decades, we came together to overcome the relentless opposition from the gun lobby, gun manufacturers, and so many politicians opposing commonsense gun legislation. And we beat them. And we did it through a bipartisan effort that included the majority of responsible gun owners.

We're not stopping here. Again, it's—I'll say it again. I'm not going to be quiet until we get it done: It's time again to ban assault weapons and high-capacity magazines. If you need 80 shots in a magazine, you shouldn't own a gun.

Because, look, last time we did it, it worked. We also—last time, we established universal background checks and required safe storage of firearms. It's time. It's time.

Look, while we push for Congress to do more, we're going to centralize, accelerate, and intensify our work to save more lives more quickly. That's why this new White House Office of Gun Violence Prevention—it's what it's designed to do. It will drive and coordinate a Government and a nationwide effort to reduce gun violence in America.

And it will be overseen by an incredible Vice President, who understands this more than any Vice President has. *[Applause]* No, really. That's not hyperbole, that's a fact. She's been on the frontlines of this issue her entire career as a prosecutor, as an attorney general, and as a United States Senator. Her deep experience will be invaluable for this office.

And Stef—where is Stef Feldman?

Vice President Kamala D. Harris. She's right there.

The President. Stef, I want you to stand up, please. Stef Feldman, who's been working on this issue with me since the Sandy Hook in 2012—now, she was 13 years old when she joined

me, but—[laughter]—since 2012—will serve as Director of the Office. An office—and the Office will have four primary responsibilities:

First, to expedite the implementation of the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act and the executive actions already announced. And I mean it: We're going to fully implement them.

Second, coordinate more support for survivors, families, and communities affected by gun violence, including mental health care, financial assistance—the same way FEMA responds to natural disasters.

Audience member. That's right! That's right!

The President. The same way. And it helps folks recover and rebuild and alter. Look, folks, shootings are the ultimate superstorm, ripping through communities.

Third, identify new executive actions we can take within our legal authority to reduce gun violence.

And fourth, expand our coalition of partners in States and cities across America, because we do have partners, to get more—we need more State and local help to get these laws passed locally as well—and to strengthen our laws and give us more hope.

Folks, to be clear, none of these steps alone is going to solve the entirety of the gun violence epidemic. None of them. But together, they will save lives. And it's going to help. It will help rally the Nation with a sense of urgency and seriousness of purpose.

Today, guns—I never thought I'd even remotely say this in my whole career—guns are the number-one killer of children in America. Guns are the number-one killer of children in America—the United States of America. More than car accidents, more than cancer, more than other diseases.

In 2023 so far, our country has experienced more than 500 mass shootings and well over 30,000 deaths due to gun violence. This is totally unacceptable. It's not who we are. And we have to act, and we have to act now.

And let me be very clear: If Members of the Congress refuse to act, then we'll need to elect new Members of Congress that will act. Democrat or Republican.

Look, folks, there comes a point where our voices are so loud, our determination so clear, that our effort can no longer be stopped. We're reaching that point. We've reached that point today, in my view, where the safety of our kids from gun violence is on the ballot.

At the end of the day, whether they're Democrats or Republicans, we all want our families to be safe. We all want to go to school, houses of worship, grocery stores, gyms, malls, movies without constant anxiety. We all want our kids to have the freedom to learn how to read and write in school instead of duck and cover, for God's sake. And it matters.

So let me close with this. Earlier this summer, I was in Connecticut at a summit on gun safety hosted by Senator Murphy. Four students impacted by gun violence, who are here with us today, summoned extraordinary courage and stood and shared their stories on stage. Four of them.

They each came from different backgrounds, different parts of the country, different shootings. But they shared a common, singular message that one of them summed up in just a few words, and I quote, "the deadly and traumatic price for inaction." That's what he talked about: the deadly and traumatic price for inaction.

They made clear what all of you know too well: That price can no longer be the lives of our children and the people of our country. They spoke for an entire generation of Americans who will not be ignored, will not be shunned, and will not be silenced.

And I know—I know—progress is hard. I've been at this a long time. But we've done it before, and we can do it again. If we're here, I'm here to tell you that you—and Vice President Harris hears you as well.

You're right. You're right. We're by your side, and we're never going to get up—give up dealing with this problem. We're never going to forget your loved ones. We're never going to get there unless we remember.

You know, I know we'll do this because I know you: heroes. Heroes proving that even with heavy hearts, you have unbreakable spirits. In memory of your loved ones, you're building a movement that endures. Above all, you'll never give up on the one thing we must never lose: hope, hope, hope.

Jill and I, Kamala and Doug, our entire administration are more determined than ever to carry forward that hope, that inspiration, that light that you continue to give us all.

For the lives we have lost, for the lives we can save, we can do this. We just have to keep going. We just have to keep the faith. We just have to remember who we are.

Every time I'd walk out of my grandpop's house up in Scranton, he'd yell, for real, "Joey, keep the faith." And my grandmother would yell: "No, Joey, spread it. Spread it." That's what we have to do: spread the faith.

And remember—remember—and I mean this sincerely: We are the United States of America. There is nothing—nothing beyond our capacity when we do it together. Nothing we've ever tried to solve, when we've done it together, we haven't succeeded.

May God bless you all, may God protect our troops, and may God protect our children. Thank you so very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:02 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Maritza Argibay-Frost and Patrick Frost, parents of Rep. Maxwell A. Frost; Sen. Dianne Feinstein; White House Staff Secretary Stefanie G. Feldman; gun safety advocates Sari Kaufman, Aalayah Eastmond, Lucy Sarkissian, and Tre Bosley, who spoke before the President's remarks at the National Safer Communities Summit in West Hartford, CT, on June 16; and Douglas C. Emhoff, husband of Vice President Harris.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : White House Office of Gun Violence Prevention, establishment.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Argibay-Frost, Maritza; Biden, Jill T.; Bosley, Tre; Eastmond, Aalayah; Emhoff, Douglas C.; Feinstein, Dianne; Feldman, Stefanie G.; Frost, Maxwell A.; Frost, Patrick; Harris, Kamala D.; Kaufman, Sari; Murphy, Christopher S.; Sarkissian, Lucy.

Subjects: Connecticut, 2012 shooting in Newtown; Criminal background check procedures, strengthening efforts; Gun control efforts; Gun violence, prevention efforts; Mental health programs and services; Office of Gun Violence Prevention; Vice President; White House Staff Secretary.

DCPD Number: DCPD202300824.